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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the essay portion of the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test is to identify students whose English language skills are not sufficiently strong to ensure that they can successfully manage the writing required in regular freshman classes. Students are given 20 minutes to read and respond to the essay topic. The essays students produce usually are no more than one or two paragraphs long. The essays are scored holistically; that is, the essays are scored on the basis of the total impression they make on the reader. The standards for scoring are arrived at by consensus of the readers who score sample papers together. Readers are instructed to rank papers against each other, not against some ideal. Each essay is read and scored by two readers working independently. If the scores are "discrepant," the essay receives a third reading. On the six-point scale that is used, scores that differ by three points or more are considered discrepant. Sample essays receiving various scores are appended. (BW)

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New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test

Scoring the Essays

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THE TEST

The New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test is administered to admitted freshmen in all New Jersey public colleges and to admitted freshmen in those independent colleges in the state that have asked to participate in the testing program. The test has as its purpose the identification of students whose English language skills and mathematical skills are not sufficiently strong to ensure that they can successfully manage the reading, writing, computation, and elementary algebra generally required in regular freshman classes.

To describe the student's skill in using the English language in reading and writing, the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test provides the following five scores:

1. Total English score, a composite score based on the Reading Comprehension, Sentence Sense, and Essay sections
2. Reading Comprehension
3. Sentence Sense
4. Essay
5. Composition score, a composite score based on the Sentence Sense and Essay sections

The scale used to report NJCBSPT scores, except the Essay score, is devised to have a mean of 165 and a standard deviation of 10 (based on the students who took the test during Cycles 1 through 6 of 1978). The Essay score is reported as the sum of scores given by two independent readers. Reported Essay scores range from 0, an off-topic or insufficient response, to 12, the highest score.

THE SELECTION OF THE ESSAY TOPIC

New Jersey college faculty members take an active part in the development of the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test. The Reading and Writing Committee, for example, specifies the content of the English sections of the test and approves all multiple-choice questions used to measure that content. In addition, this committee is responsible for selecting the essay topic used in the test.

An essay is included in the test as a direct measure of writing ability. It provides students with the opportunity to show how well they can put sentences and paragraphs together to give coherent expression to their own ideas; how effectively they can marshall evidence to support their arguments; and how well they can use the language at their command to interest the reader, to present and maintain a point of view, and to communicate their thoughts on a subject with precision, clarity, and even—in the best papers—some grace. No multiple-choice test as yet devised measures these attributes of writing.

If the essay is to be an opportunity for students rather than a barrier, the topic the students write on must possess certain qualities. (It is desirable to have all students write on the same topic so that their essays can easily and validly be compared.) The topic must be one that students—and this includes students in all age groups—have an interest in and have something to say about; it should deal with something that allows them to draw examples from their personal experience. The topic must not be too abstract or too mundane; it must not be too broad or too limited; it must be about something familiar, but not so familiar that the student has already produced essay after essay on the topic. It must appeal to urban students as well as rural students, must be fair to every ethnic group, must not be so controversial that students and readers become too emotional for fair assessment of writing ability, and must be easily read and easily interpreted. In other words, the topic must do nothing to prevent students from writing as well as they can and must do everything to inspire the very best writing from everyone taking the test.

Finding a topic that meets these specifications is the almost impossible task facing the Reading and Writing Committee each year. To begin with, each committee member submits 10 topics that he or she considers suitable. These topics are thoroughly discussed—some to be discarded and some to be revised to serve as one of the 10 topics that are pretested each year in New Jersey college classrooms.

Approximately 100 students in both developmental and regular classes write 20-minute essays in response to each of the topics being tried out. The responses are used by the committee and other New Jersey college English faculty members to evaluate the appropriateness of the topic: Do the students understand the topic? Do they have something to say? Can they provide specific examples? Does the topic elicit a range of responses? Does it trigger highly emotional responses? —to list just a few of the questions evaluators ask. Few topics pass this rather rigorous selection procedure and are approved for use in the actual New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test. As a matter of fact, though the committee may begin the process by selecting from among more than 50 topics presented for consideration, by the end of the process the committee often finds that only one topic of the 10 chosen for pretesting is suitable for use.

THE ESSAY

The following instructions are given to students taking the essay portion of the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test. The essay topic that follows the instructions below is the one used in the test from March 1979 to February 1980.

NEW JERSEY COLLEGE
BASIC SKILLS PLACEMENT TEST
Section 3
Essay Question
Time—20 minutes

You have twenty minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic assigned. DO NOT WRITE ON ANOTHER

TOPIC. AN ESSAY ON ANOTHER TOPIC IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

This essay is assigned to give you an opportunity to show how well you can write. You should, therefore, take care to express your thoughts on the topic clearly and effectively. How well you write is much more important than how much you write, but to cover the topic adequately you may want to write more than one paragraph. Be specific.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided on your answer sheet. You will receive no other paper on which to write. You will find that you have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size.

Read this topic carefully before you begin writing.

The communities and neighborhoods we live in have various concerns, such as high taxes, repeated power failures, water pollution, the clearing of roads in winter, new highway construction, new parks and playgrounds, better street lighting, or increased police and fire protection.

In a well-organized essay, write about a concern in your community or neighborhood, preferably one that has affected or may affect you. Tell what your concern is, and why it is a concern. Indicate what action, if any, you or your fellow citizens have taken or plan to take to deal with that concern. Be sure to be specific.

Students taking the test have never seen the topic before; they have only 20 minutes in the stress of testing conditions in which to read the topic and react to it in writing. They have little or no time for prewriting, for rewriting, for correcting, for polishing. These conditions are important to consider because they limit what can reasonably be expected from the student and, just as pertinent, suggest how closely the student should be held to the requirements of the topic.

Because the purpose of the test is to identify students who may need special help in writing skills (rather than to award credit for a course, for example), the evaluators of the essays are more interested in the quality of the written response than in its absolute relevancy to the topic. Because students who have difficulty in writing sometimes have difficulty in reading and because students under the stress of taking a test may misread or misinterpret a topic, an essay is considered to fulfill the requirements of the topic if the essay indicates in any way that the writer is attempting to address the topic, however tangential the connection with the topic may actually be.

Only those students who deliberately avoid the topic by writing on a subject like "Sighting a UFO," "The History of Rock," or "Napoleon" are penalized for their failure to address the topic. All other papers are evaluated, without penalty to the writer who has strayed a little from the narrow limits of the topic, so that schools will receive a description of the quality of the *writing* the student has produced. If, however, the student has written only one brief sentence in response to the topic, that brief response will receive a 0, to indicate that not enough writing was produced to permit a valid evaluation and that, as in the case of off-topic essays, it may be worthwhile for those who make placement decisions to ask the student to write a second essay. Schools receive neither Total English nor Composition scores for students who receive scores of 0 on the essay.

HOLISTIC SCORING

The essays students produce in 20 minutes usually are no more than one or two paragraphs long. These short paragraphs are enough to give the reader some sense of whether or not the student can write a unified paragraph, can organize ideas, can develop a logical argument, can provide specific examples, can use complete sentences, can spell, can punctuate, can interest the reader, can maintain a consistent tone, can express ideas precisely, or can do a host of other things that go into writing a good essay.

The essays are scored holistically; that is, the essays are scored on the basis of the total impression they make on the reader. The various factors that make up a piece of writing are not judged separately. All the qualities of the essay are judged at once, and every effort is made to reward the students for what has been done well rather than to penalize them for what has been done badly or not done at all. Everything that is part of the writing—the spelling, the words used, the organization, the punctuation, the sentence structure, and the rest—contributes to the impression the reader has of the written work and, therefore, to the evaluation the reader makes of that writing.

The standards for the reading are arrived at by consensus of the readers who score sample papers together. These samples and the scores these samples receive from the entire group are discussed by the readers so that each reader may understand why the majority of readers scored a paper in a particular way and adjust his or her individual standards to those of the group. No value is preassigned to a particular kind of essay; that is, no scoring manual that describes the characteristics of an "excellent" essay or a "poor" essay is distributed to the readers. The standards are set at the first reading of the topic by teachers from the various New Jersey college campuses. To ensure that essays written in September are judged in the same way as those written in May, samples from each of the earlier readings are given to the readers at the later readings for evaluation. If the readers at the later sessions differ in their evaluations from those at earlier readings, their attention is directed to the change in standards, and they are asked to score and discuss sample papers until the standards become consistent once again.

Readers are instructed to rank papers against each other, not against some ideal. This insistence on dealing with the papers at hand is designed to prevent readers from setting up a standard that even the very good

student could not meet when writing an essay on a given topic in 20 minutes.

Each essay is read and scored by two readers working independently. The score each essay receives and the score that is reported is the sum of the two readers' scores. In some cases, the scores a paper receives are "discrepant." That is, the difference between the scores the essay has received does not fall within the limits considered acceptable for a reliable reading. These papers, usually less than 1 percent of those scored, receive a third reading to determine the score that the individual essay is actually to receive. On the six-point scale that is used, scores that differ by three points or more are considered discrepant. For example, an essay with scores of 5 and 2 will receive a third reading.

To judge an essay fairly, a reader must read the essay in its entirety. Some writers make a poor beginning, but write better and better as they warm to the task. Some writers begin splendidly and then fall into problems of organization or development that mar the essay considerably. A long essay is not an automatic indication of a good essay; nor is a short essay indicative of a writer who has little control of sentence structure, organization, logic, or other aspects of writing. Some essays are not completed in the 20 minutes allowed and are judged on the quality of the writing found in what the student has accomplished; the writer is not penalized for failing to complete the task in the relatively brief time allowed for it.

A SPECIAL NOTE ON PAPERS BY STUDENTS WHOSE NATIVE LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH

Because the test is designed to determine whether a student needs special help in order to write the English language adequately, papers written by students for whom English is a second language are not judged during the reading by standards different from those used to judge papers by native speakers. There are two points to remember, however. The first is that students whose native language is not English are asked to indicate this fact on the answer sheet for the test (as part of the background information students provide about themselves). Colleges are urged to pay attention to responses to this question in placing students. Second, students who are not native speakers can be excused from taking the test until they complete an English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual program.

THE SIX-POINT SCALE

Originally, all essays written for the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test were scored on a four-point scale. A score of 4 went to the best papers, and a score of 1 went to the poorest. Most papers were neither best nor poorest and received scores of 2 or 3. Because so many papers fell into the middle two score categories, the papers within these categories necessarily demonstrated a wide range of writing ability—from almost the best to almost the poorest.

Readers and others interested in the test and the precision of its measurement suggested that it would be appropriate and advantageous to make finer distinctions among the papers in that vast middle category. In effect, they suggested that essays be scored on a six-point scale. The scale would, like the four-point scale, have no midpoint, and readers would be forced first to judge whether an individual paper should receive a score above the middle or below the middle. Once that decision was made, the reader would then judge what score above the middle (a 4, 5, or 6) or what score below the middle (a 3, 2, or 1) the essay merited.

To discover whether readers could indeed make such judgments about 20-minute essays with reliability and to ascertain whether such judgments, once made, correlated appropriately with judgments made on the four-point scale, a special study was undertaken. A spaced sample of 500 essays, drawn from all the essays written during the testing year and scored during the regular centralized readings, was rescored on the six-point scale. The results of the study indicated that scoring essays on the six-point scale was not only feasible but desirable. The reading reliability for the special study was .88, as compared to the average reading reliability of .77 when readers used the four-point scale at regular readings and as compared to a reading reliability of .81 for the 500 essays when they were read on the four-point scale. The correlation between scores on the six-point scale and those on the four-point scale was .80, indicating that readers using the new scale were ranking papers much as they were ranked at the regular readings and that distinctions were probably being made among essays in the very score categories where it was hoped they would be made. Thus, it was decided to use the six-point scale at the regular scoring sessions, and since April 1980, scores on the essay have been reported on a scale of 2 to 12; a 0 score on the essay is reported to indicate either that the essay written is one that does not respond to the required topic or that the response has been too brief to permit an accurate judgment of the quality of the response.

SAMPLE ESSAYS

The essays that follow were all written by students taking the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test. These essays were among those selected for rescoring on the six-point scale at the special reading. The scores the essays illustrate are the scores given at that special reading.

The essays are presented as the students wrote them; that is, no corrections have been made. In the interest of fairness to the various communities discussed, however, the names of those communities have been deleted.

Essays with a total score of 12 (Each reader scored the essay 6.)

Essay A

A particular problem of violation of an individual's right to privacy has arisen in my community, the town of ____. A short time ago, a nightclub began operation in a quiet, residential area of this middle-class suburban town. Lacking adequate parking facilities and maintaining little crowd control, this "disco" soon became a major source of concern to neighboring residents who felt their civil rights of peace and privacy threatened.

Soon after the club opened its doors to the public, local citizens began complaining of noise, garbage being thrown on their property, public drinking and intoxication and outright acts of violence. In a specific instance a young woman was hit with a broken bottle and the incidents which ensued triggered an all-out brawl, moving out into the street and reaching riot proportions.

To combat the infringement upon their rights as taxpayers, residents began to flood the Town Hall with complaints and petitions for the shutdown of the disco as a public nuisance. These citizens presented their complaints at town council meetings, begging officials to close the club and return to them their previously peaceful neighborhood. After much delay and "red tape", the petitions finally began to take effect. The movement was introduced to the New Jersey Superior Court, Appellate Division, and the club was declared an infringement upon the rights of local residents and a disturbance of the peace.

Today, the disco stands silent. Its doors are closed, and it will be forbidden to reopen.

Essay B

In a resort area such as ____, New Jersey, summertime tourists are the greatest concern of the year-round residents. From Memorial Day until Labor Day, ____ experiences a population boom that results in frustrations for everyone.

Traffic jams are one of the worst problems the tourists cause. Highways back up, cars overheat, and motorists shake their fists at each other during these trying times. A simple trip to the drug store, which takes six minutes in November, turns into a 45-minute journey in the scorching July heat.

Pollution and litter are also major problems during the summer months. A breath of car exhaust fumes will spoil even the most refreshing sea breeze. The overcrowded beaches are strewn with dangerous bottles and cans, as well as ugly candy wrappers, popcorn boxes, paper plates, straws, and napkins. Litter also abounds along the boardwalks and roadsides.

In spite of these and other problems, ____ looks forward to the summer season as its main source of revenue. Tourists spend their vacation money in local motels, shops, and recreation centers, and local merchants are delighted with their increased profits. The summer months also bring an excitement to the town that is lacking during other times of the year. For these reasons, ____ residents (almost) cheerfully put up with the "summer crowd."

Essay A and Essay B are well-developed, unified essays. Each of the essays focuses on a particular problem, describes that problem clearly, and supplies sufficient detail to make the reader aware of the way the problem has indeed affected the community. Neither essay is unflawed, but given that each is in the nature of a first draft of a composition produced under test conditions and within a 20-minute time limit, each paper indicates that the writer has excellent control of vocabulary and sentence structure and can organize ideas in a coherent, logical fashion.

Essays with a score of 11 (One reader gave the essay 6; the other scored the essay 5.)

Essay C

Winter is an exceptionally bad time in my community. Being an apartment dweller, I find myself at the mercy of a lazy superintendent who prefers the bottle to the shovel. And since my parking lot is private property, the municipal snow plows do worse than ignore us—they leave a gift of several feet of snow where the private parking lot meets the public street.

Occasionally the superintendent musters up enough energy to call a private snow plow operator, who promptly piles mountains of snow behind the neatly parked cars as he clears the way for visitors or late arrival tenants who can't get into their parking spaces.

We, the tenants, have made the best of it though. We all bought shovels and scrapers and mittens and long underwear and have a community "dig-out" while singing "Getting to Know You."

The pot holes and "silent policemen" are a nasty surprise for the unsuspecting visitor or forgetful tenant. Even as I write this (May 5) my less-than-diligent superintendent is less-than-hard-at-work filling in the holes—I saw him with my own eyes and could barely contain my joy. I'll soon be able to carry my groceries from the car to the apartment without breaking eggs or legs.

Still, it beats being a homeowner and having to do it all myself. I wish there were more time.

Essay D

As a tax payer, and also as a driver, I am concerned about new highway construction. In my opinion, there is too much unwarranted new construction.

As an example, I cite the Route __ bypass, which currently extends from Route __ in ____ to Route __ in ____. The purpose of this highway is to relieve rush hour traffic in and around the borough of ____ but it does not do the job. I work right in the town, and rush hour traffic there has not improved at all since the construction of the bypass. Also, I have had occasion to use the bypass during heavy morning traffic hours, and I observe that few people do use it.

There are plans to extend the Route __ bypass even further. People have had to sell their homes and move, and large areas of former farmland have been torn up, preparatory to accom-

plishing this extension. As I have stated, the present bypass is hardly used, so there seems no need to extend it.

Surely this is not the only example of unnecessary highway construction in the area, or in the country. It is costing the taxpayers far too much, and ruining many rural areas. I feel that the need for new highways should be much more carefully assessed before construction is begun.

Essays C and D are the work of competent writers; they are well organized and coherent and make appropriate use of specific examples. Essay C has a consistently humorous tone and the control of that tone through word choice and sentence structure marks the writer as highly capable. There are, however, some involved sentences and other flaws that keep the essay out of the top category. Essay D, though well done, is weakened slightly, mainly by some of its transitional devices and by its lack of real variety in sentence structure. It does not merit placement in the top category of essays.

Essays with a score of 10 (Each reader scored the essay 5.)

Essay E

A recent concern of the community of ___ was the proposed conversion of a vacant lot to a central shopping mall. The mall would have served ___ and its neighboring towns. Residents were concerned that the proposed mall would increase the influx of traffic on local streets thus making the area more dangerous to small children and causing local streets to handle more traffic then they were designed to handle. Another concern was that the mall would cause local small store owners to go out of business and therefore lose the closeness of a small town.

Residents took action against the mall by attending town council meetings, and by voting against it. Public demonstrations helped to spur interest. Due to the strong public feeling against the mall, the building permit was denied and the land rezoned to permit the construction of a senior citizens center. It was felt such a center would be beneficial to the community because it provides a necessary service which all can eventually benefit from. Also, with such a center the problems of traffic flow and local business are not likely to be increased.

The center was approved and a firm undertook to build it. At this time, construction is proceeding smoothly and the center is expected to be completely finished by the year 1981. Due to resident support, we were able to achieve our goals, yet still make use of valuable land, so it is felt the venture was a success.

Essay F

The community in which I live has taken care of most of the many problems that have faced it, such as powers failures, water pollution, parks and playgrounds, but the one major concern my neighbors and I have to now contend with is overpopulation. When the neighborhood was built, it was just a carefree suburb of life outside the city, but now the neighborhood itself has turned into a booming town and now is on it's way to becoming a small city.

When the neighborhood was first built, (fourteen years ago), people who were tired of living in the city flocked to this open area of land. As time went on these people grew to love the spacious living conditions and the many new liberties they enjoyed because of it.

But soon people from the city realized how profitable, reasonable, and enjoyable suburban living was. More of these people flocked to the suburbs and the concept of suburbanism was equated with social status. The demand for suburban homes grew so fast neighborhoods sprang up everywhere. Big landowners could no longer turn down the huge sums of money they were offered.

Once the land in an area becomes saturated with these neighborhoods it ceases to grow, but such is not the case with my neighborhood, it continued to grow. Because of its location outside of a major city and near two major highways and a turnpike industries started to open up. At first it was just shipping and sales but now companies have begun to open up factories in the area, which scares many residents.

At this time the growth of my community has slowed down somewhat, however it is still consistent. Many residents who had moved to get away from the city now are being crowded in and are moving away. Because of my community being owned now and residents are now incapable of drastic action.

The overall impression that Essays E and F leave with the reader is that they show attributes of good writing: ideas flow easily from one to the other; the details provided are relevant and appropriate. However, the writers have not mastered the mechanics of punctuation and show some imprecision in diction (for example,"...a carefree suburb of life outside the city..." in Essay F, and "... lose the closeness of a small town" in Essay E.) Such flaws indicate that these 20-minute essays deserve high, but not the highest, scores.

Essays with a score of 9 (One reader scored the essay 5; the other scored the essay 4.)

Essay G

I live in ___ which is a town built through a mountain. There are many streams and rivers flowing through ___, most of them are underground. Whenever we have a severe rainstorm, or at the end of winter when the snow and ice start to melt, our town suffers from severe flooding.

A neighbor, who has lived on my block for fifty years, told me a river flows down the center of my street. Fortunately, the street is paved, but when it rains for a day or two the pavement seems to disappear exposing the river.

I get a lot of water in my basement, which seems to just come through tiny cracks in the floor and then subsides after the rains. My cellar has been dug up and trenches and pipes installed around the edges including a pump, but they help very little.

The town is spending quite a bit of money and the town engineers are trying to figure out why the water level is suddenly rising as it is. My basement flooding is minimal, compared to some people, who are completely flooded out. There isn't much the townpeople can do about this problem unless the engineers can solve the problem first.

Essay H

I feel that a grave concern in my town, this state and indeed the entire country, is high taxes. I have lived in three states that have had state income taxes and in all cases this tax was supposed to give relief to the homeowner. Although the state tax in New Jersey is relatively new and I am not sure it has been increased as yet, I have no doubt that it will be before long. In my experience it has always increased at a rapid pace. Our elected officials now tell us that our real estate tax is quite stable and that we should be gratelul to have this state tax. They fail to point out that the real estate tax combined with the state tax makes the total tax considerably higher than before. And yet the state is facing another financial crisis. I have a philosophy that says that individuals, families, governments must live within their incomes or they face eventual disaster. The reading and observations I have made during my lieftime confirm this. The present situation in our country, with inflation destroying lives and business, is only a result of "living over our heads" for too long. I personally will work for and vote for those who show a firm resolve to speak to the people of this country the truth and follow practices that will put our nation on a firm foundation once again.

For pieces of writing produced in only 20 minutes, Essays G and H exhibit characteristics that mark them as the products of generally competent writers. Essay H, however, despite the admirable command of sentence structure it displays, is marred organizationally because the several points made in the essay are all part of a single paragraph. Essay G has creditable organization, but the sentence structure is not consistently above reproach. Compare the strength of the sentence that ends the first paragraph in Essay G to the weakness of the sentence that ends the third. Still, the overall quality of each of the essays is such that the writers can be assumed to have an adequate knowledge of the ways that words and structures can be used to advantage in writing.

Essays with a score of 8 (Each reader scored the essay 4.)

Essay I

The subdivision where I am living is set back in the country. Very quiet and clean. Our main concern is transportation. We do have a small drugstore in our vicinity but this is not enough. Wives who stay home all day find it rather boring without the luxury of a second car. With no way of getting around to different areas, their lives have become somewhat isolated. Things such as, shopping malls, supermarkets and other accessories are a good distance from our neighborhood.

So a group of ladies one being my mother, decided to work out a carpool system. Each lady who was a part of the group discussed the matter with their husbands and they all came to the decision that while the wives are carpooling, the husbands would also be carpooling. It worked this way, on one day, one man would carpool with a group of other men, and the wives were left with the cars. The next day it was reversed, the wives had one car and the men were able to drive to work in their own cars. It worked out that everyday there was always one or two women with a car and at least one of them was always ready to go.

Essay J

Crime in the Community

There is cause for alarm in the ever rising crime rate. The cities of our country are no longer the major areas feeling the strongest impact of the affects of crime. Now we in suburbia must shudder also.

I live in ___ and was a few years ago the victim of a burglar. May I say until you have personally experienced the fear of knowing that a total stranger entered your private domain and actually intruded on the privacy of your boudoir and rest. Not to speak of the loss of personal property stolen by the culprit, can one know the true essence of fear, of wondering will they return?

The feeling becomes real every nite. There was a time you could breathe on a summer nite—no longer now the windows must be locked. Every strange noise becomes a threat. The fear continues.

And what is to be done. The court systems are so bogged down with cases and the jails already full—supposedly are two reasons why the criminal—if caught is given a slap on the wrist—a light sentence and finally sent to return to his life of crime. He has no fear for he knows so many of his own are never apprehended and they seem to have the law on their side much of the time.

It is time for peace officers to be professionals and not the criminals. The police departments are understaffed and the paradox is the citizens taxes must be raised to properly staff and protect the community but if this happens the public will cry out—for what is worse than paying more taxes—Maybe it's Crime.

Essay I and Essay J are, for 20-minute essays, adequate. Each indicates some understanding of sentence structure, for example, but not mastery of it. Even though the two essays received the same scores, Essay I does not have as many mistakes in spelling and punctuation as does Essay J. The differences between the two essays are indicative both of the range in quality of essays at a given score level and of the way in which particular strengths of an essay may override, in the minds of the scorers, some obvious weaknesses. Essay J, despite its failures in punctuation and spelling, is well organized and has a clear focus; its writer also shows a good command of vocabulary. In general the writers of both essays have demonstrated enough command of the various aspects of writing ability to

warrant placing their essays in the upper half; the essays are certainly not the best, but they are not without some merit.

Essays with a score of 7 (One reader scored the essay 4; the other scored the essay 3.)

Essay K

An experience I had recently was a major concern not only for me, but for my neighbors around me. In my neighborhood there is a slight problem with the flooding of water in our basements. Continuously, as it rains, each and every house around me is ready to start bailing out the water with our little pails. This is where the experience comes in. There was an unusually terrible rainstorm one afternoon, and being it a weekday nobody was home. I arrived home from school with the surprise of my life. There was at least a foot of water in my basement. I must have called at least ten of my close friends to help me out. All ten of us with our pants rolled up to our knees, and barefoot in the ice cold water tried to reduce the level of the water by tossing it out the door.

There is not much my neighbors and I could do about this situation. The rain will never stop. Well, the next time it pours, I will be ready to start tossing and bailing.

Essay L

Living in rural southern New Jersey as I do I am well aware of the dangers that develop as the population density of a sparsly settled community increases. Tax rates increase with the damand for services and traffic problems increase, but of greater concern to me is the effect on the water supply.

Water is prerequsit to existance as we know it. In rural areas it is supplied by wells and disposed of in septic systems. Increases in population density increase the demand on the ecology system to purify the water and aditionaly shift water tables. The level of potable water drips and requires depper wells. The level of contaminated surface water rises and floods basements and low sections both have happend to me.

A step to correct this is the county sewarge systerm and minamum and requirements for the isuance of building permits.

Essays K and L show qualities that call for their placement among the upper half of the papers written on this topic as well as qualities that call for their placement among the lower half. Essay K, for example, has basically good sentences, but the connections between those sentences are sometimes not clear, and the essay lacks the coherence it should have. The writer of Essay L has a fine vocabulary, but difficulty in spelling. The clarity and structure of sentences in the essay vary in quality, as the first two sentences demonstrate. It is fitting that these essays are rated exactly in the middle of the score scale.

Essays with a score of 6 (Each reader scored the essay 3.)

Essay M

There are several concerns in my community. The one I am most concerned with would be the threat of nuclear power in our society, local an nationwide. In my opinion nuclear power is unsafe for many reasons. Another nuclear catastrophy, such as 3 mile island may happen again. Possibly in greater intensity or maybe irriversible damage may be done. Authoritys on the subject say that this is highly improbable but, if this happend once it can an will happen again.

Radiation can cause, mutation, pollution, and death if unleashed. The people who operate these plants are human beings and are subject to making human mistakes. I would not want to place my life in the hands of another person when it concerned something as important as this, no matter how highly educated or trained in the field. These people are still subject to error.

There are several organization which are against nuclear power and I can only hope that one or all can put a hault to this impossing threat to mankind.

Essay N

Neighborhood crime and drug problems are a major concern to me. I have seen drugs sold by the high school students to 7th, 8th, and even grammer school students. Crime and vandalisum are also major problems which have boomed since the population has grown. The neighborhood I speak of is known by local patrol officers as one of the worst. To correct these problems some action must be taken.

Many proposals have been considered by older people in the neighborhood. One all were in favor of was the formation of a vigalantie group to inflict the same damage upon the kids which they inflict upon the adults. I think a solution would be to inlarge the local police force. This would be a costly venture and that is one resone why people will not go along with it. The money spent to repair damage could be spent in local taxes to enlarge the police force. Not only officers are needed. Specialy trained people are needed to cope with the problems. People who can understand the needs of the youth and who could find solutions to these problems with out violence. A crack down must be made in local schools where much drug abuse and vandilisum occurs. The formation of special police counciers to handle these drug selling students. In the school it self changes must be made to try to understand these students and change there ways. It is truly a costly expense but it could be worth it in the long run. I would be worth the expense if we all worked together. People complaine taxes are high. They fail to realise that they will only go higher if we don't begin to work together and put.

In Essays M and N, the development of the main idea is neither clear nor logical. The writers jump from one idea to the next without bothering to relate one idea to another. Because the essays also have other flaws, the overall impression they create is one of inadequacy. The clustering of seemingly unrelated ideas into single paragraphs in Essay M underscores its lack of logical organization and the writer's failure to make appropriate use of connectives. Essay N lacks coherence. In addition, the pattern of the sentences used lacks variety,

and little attempt has been made to use transitions and other kinds of connecting words. The two essays clearly belong in the lower half of the score categories.

Essays with a score of 5 (One reader scored the essay 3; the other scored the essay 2.)

Essay O

The problem that concerns me most are, clearing of roads in the winter, and police and fire protection. During the last three or four years I broken my leg several times because of slippery or icing on the streets and sidewalks and spent many month in the hospital with multiple operations. This happened because someone didn't shovel their sidewalks. I think the snowplows should do more cleaning of the sidestreets. In my neighborhood the block association has asked everyone to shovel their own property, and the company down the street has to get their trucks through, so they send a snow-plow which helps our block a lot, we are luckier then some of our neighbors.

Our police and fire department could be better. It really hurts, to know that it is unsafe to leave your house, walk the streets or try to go shopping without being ripped off. I really think, this newer generation has lost respect for law and order. Our mores have change somuch over the last decade, so has our laws. In this day and age the persons who commit these crimes are more coddled than punished. They think pulling a firealarm is a joke. Many persons are killed each year because of false alarms. This should be a severely punished crime. The policemen need more leway in handling criminals.

Essay P

The communities and neighborhoods we live in have various concerns at present. Yet, inspite of these concerns those of better street lighting and increased police protection should be given immediate attention. The existence of these two concerns, better street lighting and increased police protection should constitute a signal.

What is the signal? The signal is the undispited fact that, crimes must be a rapidly rising epidemic, otherwise the community would not be so concerned. But, now another question to ask is if the problem should be remedied by the methods of increased police protection or additional lighting?

It seems as if the solution is not to be found in the afore mentioned concerns. But, that the solution might rest within the community among such groups as the PTA.

Essay O and Essay P are weak compositions. Essay O presents ideas one after the other, almost as they occur in the writer's thoughts, but little effort is spent on making the relationship between the ideas clear to the reader. Essay P deals with only one idea, but that idea is obscured somewhat by the written words that present it. Despite these and other obvious flaws, the essays are not so weak as to be placed among those that have received lower scores.

Essays with a score of 4 (Each reader scored the essay 2.)

Essay Q

The concern that has caught the community eyes are the constant amount of robbies that has suddenly come into effect. The community where we are is a pleasant one, very quite and the events that occur shocked everyone, because it could happen to each and everyone of us living there.

The neighborhood has form a neighborhood eye watch, this deals with actions being taken to prevent the crimes that has already been counted for. Groups have had meetings at each other house, deciding on what action has to be taken, the park house has also been used as a place of gathering, the local policemen have talked at several meetings, saying on what to do to prevent the robbries. Now we constantly have police cars every so often riding by checking the neighborhood also the neighbors has an eye out when someone goes away for vacation or work.

Essay R

In my development were I live some people wanted some kind of dog law made. In the respect of keeping your dog locked up. The development was split in half. One half wanted, "If you have a dog it must be kept behined a fence or on a chain." The other half wanted the dogs to run freely for there was enough land around to do so. Well the people who wanted the dogs chained up started to do something but I guess they gave up cause the dogs are still running about freely. As far as what side I was on I'll say this my dog is running freely.

Both Essay Q and Essay R exhibit significant flaws in sentence structure. Each essay focuses on a single subject, but, especially in Essay R, the topic of the essay is not fully developed. Essay Q has coherence in that the writer does not introduce extraneous information. However, the writer's failure to divide the statements made into conventional sentences and the absence of those connecting words that might help the reader decipher the relationship between the ideas presented put the essay firmly in the lower half of the score category. Nevertheless, the flaws in these essays are not so great that they entirely obscure the message their writers are trying to convey.

Essays with a score of 3 (One reader scored the essay 2; the other scored the essay 1.)

Essay S

Parks and Playgrounds

Our Parks and Playgrounds in the City of ___ is nice for the children but they need a lot of improvement in the areas of Po-

lice Protection and supervision. I would like to see our Parks and Playgrounds keep much cleaner too and that would add a lot of vaule to our City and more respect and dignity. I work with the Boy Scouts of America and sometimes have a clean up drive and this is the way that I help our City or I should say my boys and I.

Essay T

A concern to me in the community of which I live in, is the ever growing danger of water pollution. With the consisting domping of chemicals in our county it is a ever lasting damger to man and all wildlife. Once the chemicals are dromped and slip through the earth and into our underground water streams people are forced to drink the water and not knowing of the danger they are in at the time. And for what, just people dromping illeally for money, these people when apprehand by the police should be trided and punished by the people, affect. This way if punished harselly it just mite slow down the ever growing threat to unsanity.

For the most part, what is being said in Essays S and T is clear, although the problems in sentence structure, spelling, and logical connection sometimes interfere with the communication. The essays are extremely weak.

Essays with a score of 2 (Each reader scored the essay 1.)

Essay U

In the communitie where I live the neighbors are trying to get funds set up for new equipment, for the park on _____ St. or School Yard when school is in session. They would like to have New Swings, Benches, Slidding, Boads and also there is a Big sand hole in the ground. They would like for to be sea-Mented.

Essay V

I am very concern in the communty in which I live in. The problems that the communty deals with are most know thoughthout people. By people not having certain things taken care of can make life a little harder.

It concerns me to a great deal for I am a civiten of this city And I also feel if the people of the city or communlty have to deal with uncomfortable livings, that they shouldn't do their part, such not paying taxes, disagreeing to an exent on things the city government would asked for.

But not as fas as destroying their communty more than it is.

The reader of Essays U and V must work hard to extract the message from the writing because the writers have such an inadequate command of the written language. The essays are the weakest of the group.